

Area Plans

What is an area plan and how is it used?

Area plans address land use and design. The plan provides a land use recommendation for every parcel in the planning area and also provides guidelines related to the architecture and site design of future development proposals. An area plan does not propose new development, but instead it is used to help guide development proposals initiated by property owners. If a property owner submits a zoning or variance request, city staff and the community will review the area plan to determine if the request is consistent the recommendations of the plan. An area plan becomes city policy after it is adopted by City Council. An area plan is not code, and it does not change existing zoning regulations. All adopted Columbus plans are posted at <https://www.columbus.gov/planning/documentlibrary/>.

What is in the plan?

The primary elements of an area plan include existing conditions, a land use plan and design guidelines.

What is a “land use” plan?

A land use plan includes both a map and policy text and is a section of the area plan. The land use plan provides a land use recommendation for every parcel in the planning area. Recommended land use can generally be categorized as residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial uses. Residential categories also include density recommendations. Please refer to “What is an area plan and how is it used?” for more information on how the plan is used.

What are design guidelines?

Design guidelines address the visual component of development. The guidelines provide recommendations for the size, placement, height and design of residential and commercial development. Connectivity, open space and natural features are also addressed by the guidelines. Please refer to “What is an area plan and how is it used?” for more information on how the plan is used.

How does the plan help my community?

Area plans provide clear and predictable policy regarding development in the area and provide a framework for the community to make zoning and land use decisions. In general, area plans work to enhance established neighborhoods, encourage reinvestment and guide growth. Area plan recommendations for mixed use development along primary corridors, high quality design, and natural resource preservation are examples of how a plan can work to make your community better.

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How are the recommendations determined?

The recommendations of an area plan are based on staff analysis of existing land use, existing density and existing zoning, a detailed review of existing area plans and standards, city policy, guidance from area stakeholders, and public input.

What process is used to adopt an area plan?

The planning process includes existing conditions research, a review of existing plans, staff analysis and public input. City staff engage with community stakeholders (residents, business owners and local developers) through public meetings, stakeholder interviews, online surveys and social media. At the end of the process, the Area Commission (or Civic Association if an Area Commission does not exist) will provide a recommendation to City Council regarding adoption of the area plan. If the plan receives positive support from the community, the plan will be presented to Development Commission and then to City Council for adoption.

What is zoning?

Zoning regulates the type of activity that may occur within specific geographic areas of the city. The Columbus Zoning Code provides zoning districts that can be grouped under three general categories: residential, commercial and industrial. Zoning districts regulate the use, placement, spacing and size of land and buildings within each district. For more information about zoning visit the City of Columbus Building and Zoning Services webpage at www.columbus.gov/bzs/primary/zoning

Will the area plan change existing zoning?

No, an area plan does not change existing zoning or the zoning code. Recommendations within an area plan only apply when a property owner initiates a request to change the current zoning of a site or requests a variance from the existing zoning code regulations.

Does an area plan require property owners to change existing conditions on their property?

No, plan recommendations do not apply to existing development. Recommendations within an area plan only apply when a property owner initiates a rezoning or variance request for future development.

Do recommendations in the plan apply to all future development in the plan area?

No, development that is permitted based on existing zoning does not go through the plan review process. Property owners and developers, however, are encouraged to review the adopted area plan and implement the recommendations when possible with future development.

Why does the plan provide land use recommendations on sites where the community doesn't want to see development occur?

Area plans provide the opportunity to help shape and direct the development patterns of an area, but they are not able to prevent future development from occurring. Providing an informed and appropriate recommendation for each parcel in the area better equips city staff and the community to respond to proposals for future development.

The area has traffic congestion - why doesn't the plan include recommendations for roadway and infrastructure improvements?

While it is recognized that future development proposals may have an impact on roadway congestion, roadway and intersection improvements are planned by the Department of Public Service. It is not within the scope of an area plan to provide recommendations for roadway improvements.

How does an area plan address parks and open space?

Parks and open space are reflected in a number of ways in an area plan. The Park and Recreation designation primarily refers to existing City parkland or Metro Parks, while the Open Space designations are used to denote areas such as cemeteries, regulated floodways and private golf courses. Area plans do not provide recommendations for new parks or open space on specific parcels for several reasons: property owners have a legal right to develop their property as permitted by the zoning code and in accordance with the existing zoning district on the site, a recommendation for public parkland can complicate the purchase process and impact the market value of the land, and a recommendation may establish an expectation that cannot be realized.

While it is not within the scope of an area plan to provide recommendations for new parks or open space on specific sites, area plans do provide design guidelines related to open space and natural resources preservation including the recommendation to include open space or explore parkland dedication with the redevelopment of low density residential, institutional, agriculture, or private open space sites. Recommendations for new parkland will be coordinated with the City's Recreation and Parks Department and will be based on the standards and priorities identified by Recreation and Parks staff. The Recreation and Parks Department may be contacted with questions regarding parks in a given area.